

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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Guest: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School and AEI

Table of Contents

I: The Challenge of Radical Islam 00:15 – 40:14

II: How We Can Fight Back 40:14 – 1:06:38

I: The Challenge of Radical Islam (00:15 – 40:14)

KRISTOL: Hi I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased today to have as my guest, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, author of several bestselling books. The first one I remembered reading and being very influenced by *Infidel*, and then *Nomad*, and now *Heretic*, I think. And you're a fellow at Harvard's Belfer Center and the American Enterprise Institute. So thank you for joining me here.

HIRSI ALI: Thank you for having me. Great to see you, Bill.

KRISTOL: Great to see you, and I'm looking forward to this conversation. We're speaking a week after the attack in San Bernardino in early December, and one of the attackers is a Muslim woman. And don't take this the wrong way, but I thought of you because one of the most interesting parts of your book is how you were radicalized as a younger woman, as a teenager, and became for awhile a pretty pious and, I guess as they say, radicalized, almost, Muslim.

Everyone knows about your subsequent life and very courageous and distinguished career. In light of what has just happened, how does it happen? What happened to you, and what conclusions did you draw from your own experience?

HIRSI ALI: There are two things that I would like to talk about in depth on that. One is, you should not be politically correct about the fact that there is something within Islam, an ideology that is appealing, that is familiar, and that people who are born into Islam, not everyone, but a lot of us feel attracted to. And, initially it's peaceful, and initially, it's a good thing.

And the second thing is to talk about my experience. I'll say this, and I've said it before is the most relevant part of my biography at all is this – knowing how easily as an individual you can really be taken in with what I now call a totalitarian ideology that is embedded in the religion of my parents.

I was 15 or 16 years old, and I was in secondary school, and I think you call that high school here –

KRISTOL: This is in Nairobi?

HIRSI ALI: Nairobi, Kenya. I went to secondary school, and in that school, like many other schools, we had what we called the Islamic Religious Education class, IRE.

In previous classes, the class was taught pretty much the way one would teach a history class. You got, you know, "Muhammad founded the religion this year, and then a few years later this happened, and a few years later, that happened," and all the way to the present. Then, this woman comes into this class – she asked us to call her Sister Azia, which is very different from what we called the other teachers, which

was always Mr. or Mrs. So instead of asking us to call her Ms. Azia because she wasn't married, she asked us to call her Sister Azia.

She gathered us, those of us who volunteered to go take the IRE class and said, "How many of you here are Muslims?" Which is, of course, a very interesting question – when we looked around and thought, "It is the IRE class, it's the Islamic Religion Education class, we're all Muslim." And she took us in a very gentle – and I would say – in a very charismatic way and appealed to our intellect, which was different from how I was used to learning religion.

On Saturdays and Sundays, my mother sent us to Koran school, and the Koran was drummed into us, literally. We had to recite as loudly as possible and copy from the Koran onto something, and then we had to be beaten if we didn't – if we didn't do what the teacher told us and if we didn't just, you know, recite what we had learned or wrote –

KRISTOL: Your family was religious, but you, yourself, at that point?

HIRSI ALI: I was just going along, yeah. Going along. We didn't really think that much about religion because I come from a family and context – at that point everybody around me was Muslim so you don't ask yourself, are you a Muslim or not a Muslim? And that is just how religion is taught at that point.

Except – and here is this new development – this female teacher says, "Are you a Muslim?" And we say we are, and she starts to take us, and she makes us aware of the fact that even though we identify ourselves as Muslim we were, in fact, not doing very much about it, and we were indistinguishable from the non-Muslim students in school.

We didn't cover our hair. She asked, "When was the last time you prayed?" I didn't remember I had prayed. I associated – "Do you have Christians as your friends?" – we didn't have Jews in my school, they were Christians – and we would say, "Yes." She made us aware that the answers to all of these questions were wrong. And so then we started becoming more pious. Trying to observe as much as possible our Islamic obligations, trying to pray five times, all five of them.

In a modern context and as a teenager, that's extremely difficult. During the month of Ramadan, try to fast all 30 days, and when you're menstruating those five days, you're not allowed to, and you have to repay those. Then, all that has to be distanced yourself from the unbelievers. I remember the way that we would pray – we would pray, before this influence, and when you're done praying you look to your right and you look to your left, and you get on with the rest of the day. That changed because now we had to sit back and start the supplication prayer, and it always ended with "Please destroy the Jews, please destroy Israel."

Now, in the United States of America and in Israel and in the Middle East, that might make sense to people but I'm in Nairobi, Kenya, never seen a Jewish person in my life, and know at that point nothing about Israel. So in many ways, when I reflect back on that time I think, "Okay, what I experienced at that point as becoming more pious and more observant is what we've now come to call radicalization and extremism and so on and so forth."

KRISTOL: And that takes place in a school that's not a madrasa that we hear about, it's not an Islamic school. It was just a secondary school?

HIRSI ALI: Most of my teachers were Christian or Hindu, if you came from the Indian subcontinent. Some of them called themselves Bora – to me, just meant you were from India. Religion was there, people were religious, but it wasn't your only identity.

So at that point when I'm 16 years old, and I'm going to that school, I'm a Somali, when I'm among Somalis, I'm of the sub-clan Darod. When Somalis are together, they don't refer to each other as

Somalis, it's the clan identity that is uppermost. And then there were students from Yemen, from Pakistan, Kenyan students, and you had all of these identities.

Your religion wasn't the one identity, and that is one thing, if we talk about the process of what we now call radicalization, that you see a process where individuals are putting on a religious identity. It's all about being a Muslim, you shed the rest of it or you downplay the rest of it and you try to make everyone else as pious as yourself. And this would be, looking back at San Bernardino, the telltale signs. These changes that the family, the friends, the close circle of relatives should have observed. And here's probably where it gets a little difficult. If indeed they did, how much of it did they agree with? And that makes it every very difficult to address Islamic extremism and combat it, but we have to anyway.

KRISTOL: And so psychologically now that you – how long did this stage go?

HIRSI ALI: So there are two levels. It's on a personal level on how I changed personally and how my neighborhood and my school and the area around me changed. So if I looked back to Nairobi and perhaps even Somalia, because we were embedded in the Somali expatriate community in Kenya, there was, you know – again, like I said, people weren't religious but just to describe a street scene, men and women mixed, and we went to weddings where men and women mixed. It was a traditional dress but for women it was very colorful.

Women wore perfume, they wore jewelry, they tried to look as attractive as possible, and in fact, that was something that one had to be proud of. As a woman, you go out and try to look as attractive as possible. And if I now look at those same neighborhoods and those same streets, I see that change, and I think I was there at the early stages when all the women are covered, they try to look as unattractive as possible. There is this attempt at separating men from women, and so this on a personal level, I did it because my teacher was telling me – and she wasn't the only one, even the weekend Koran classes changed.

They were taken over by what we now called extremists, but we thought of them as pious and pure Muslims. The message I was getting was "You cannot be, you cannot carry on behaving the way you are behaving and remain a Muslim," so I started to cover and I changed along with the street and with the neighborhood.

Interestingly, "Do not ask questions." As a teenager, you are at, you know, the phase in your life when you start to ask questions of, you know, why am I here? What is the point of this life? What's the difference between right and wrong? And the answers we were getting from the super-pious – let me call it the new Islam, it's not a new Islam; it was our Islam, but becoming, you know, aware what our religion is – "The answers are in the Koran, and they're in— the Prophet Mohammad has laid it all out there."

So instead of asking why and when and why did Muhammad say that and why does God want this? I was concerned about, obviously, suddenly how I didn't have equal rights with my brother or the men around me, but the right as a woman that we had became even less and less and less. We had to submit more than they did, we were the ones that were supposed to cover our head, stay away from public, you know, the public square. And so then you say but why does Allah want that?

And that wasn't only frowned upon it was punished as being sinful, and, you know, I was told if I asked these questions by both of those teachers that I had to very careful to not allow Satan into my thoughts. Critical thinking is one thing that I think, and it's the fast step – but it's one thing that these guys fear. It's the one thing that they fear the most, and it's the one thing that we haven't applied to them, unfortunately.

KRISTOL: How long did you become pious, if that is the right word?

HIRSI ALI: Yes, pious and observant. I became, instead of being a passive Muslim, I became an active, observant Muslim. This lasted until I went to the Netherlands.

And, I do remember in the late 1980s, and 1989 and 1990, kind of having problems with, you know – my worldview became narrower and narrower and narrower, and it was constant worship, constant references to the Prophet Muhammad and constant references to the Koran. It was as if you couldn't go from here to there without first consulting a holy book that was written in the 7th century.

I think what happen to me is I underwent – I went through a process of cognitive dissonance where I was having question marks pop up in my head about the rightfulness of this change, but I didn't dare ask those questions. And for me – and this is again on reflection – and I'm now about 19 or 20 years old, I'm terrified of hellfire. And the use of the tool hellfire, that makes it incredibly difficult if you're a Muslim to come out of this and say, "I don't buy into this." Or even just start the composition about, you know, questions.

When I left Kenya and went to the Netherlands – and I was in the Netherlands – and my first port of arrival into Europe, into the West, was in Germany – and the physical environment was so radically different from what I was used to and the longer I stayed and the more I started to have friendships with native Dutch people, the more I liked what I saw.

And the more I liked what I saw, the more I wanted to understand where all this came from. I come to the Netherlands, I am from Somalia, and I'm not the only one, there are all these other people coming from all over the world asking for asylum, and, you know, we were treated in the most humane way. I remember the scene when I first asked for asylum in the Netherlands, I'm asked to sit down by an agent behind a locker, and then a man in uniform comes towards me and I think, "This is the end of it, he's going to arrest me." Because that's exactly how life was in Kenya and Ethiopia, and you feared people in uniform, you feared the state.

This guy comes to me and asks if I'd like a cup of coffee or a cup of tea. And it's this kind of thing that we take it for granted now and I never take it granted, but a lot of people take it for granted, and I think you can't, you shouldn't, you mustn't. It hasn't always been like this.

In any case, my environment is radically different than what I was used to, and I want to understand it, and two and a half years into my residence in the Netherlands, I apply for a place at the Leiden University. As a very grateful graduate of that university, I want to say what they taught me there was how to think and they encouraged critical thinking. I wasn't taught much about Islam. From 1995 to 2000. And I took – I did a Master's in Political Science. Very little if anything came up about Islam, it didn't really come up that much. So 9/11, it took everyone by surprise.

But looking back, what I do remember is, you know, my professors' insistence on not only having us exposed to all of these ideas and this history of politics and power and, you know, introduction to sociology to history, introduction – and in this case, European history is what they sort of shortened it to. But you're exposed to all of these ideas and theories, but the insistence of my professors was this was not a science, but a theory. Everything is a hypothesis. And we had to not only read the works, the original works of the people that came up with the theories but their critics as well. And then we were sent off to think critically of the critics and maybe come up with an original idea that was an improvement of what was already in place. It's this constant exercise in critical thinking that I think, ultimately –

I graduated just before 9/11, I graduated in September of 2000. I think it is those five years that helped when 9/11 happened, and at the time, I was a believing Muslim, not a practicing Muslim, but a believing Muslim. When I was confronted with the atrocity of the attacks in New York and Washington, DC, I couldn't say to myself this has nothing to do with my religion. And I think it was those five years in Leiden that got me to that place where I could have an honest conversation with myself first about my faith and about my morality and about my background. And what I shared with those 19 men. And that, in fact, if I had continued on the path that Sister Azia had put me on I might have been one of them, if not in that

sensational way that they did – the hijacking about airlines isn't what I'm talking about, but something like what the woman in San Bernardino, Tashfeen Malik, did.

I would have been a willing executioner of jihads if I had stayed on the path that Sister Azia had put me on.

KRISTOL: What's chilling about this, in a way, one wonders about – you came to the Netherlands, you had to come, really, for other reasons, but as you say, if you had stayed there and perhaps had – maybe you would have, in any case, turned against or met people who would have raised questions or not – but that's what – there all these hundreds of millions of people who aren't going to come to study at Leiden University, and how does one get them out of the charismatic appeal?

And say a little more about the appeal because I think that's something that we in the West underestimate. Most Westerners are pretty secular, some are religious, but not – used to living in a secular world, let's put it that way, and very hard, I think, to understand how – it just seems like sickness, almost if you get seduced into this, but I think that misses the depth of the appeal, somehow. It's often some of the most impressive people that can get attracted to this.

HIRSI ALI: Also very smart people. So I think, first, it starts with familiarity. The people we have who come to Islamic extremism do not bring anything new, they build on what you already have. My parents taught me that everything in the Koran is true, it's the true word of God. That we should try as much as possible do what the Prophet Mohammed told us to do. And that's how they start the conversation. "I'm not bringing anything new. I'm not asking you to worship me, I'm just asking you to worship Allah. And how do I know that? It's in the Koran."

So they start with what you already know. It's empowering because once you go down this path of "I'm only going to consult Scripture," you get these black-and-white answers to very complex questions. It may be complex questions of identity, or complex questions of power. There's a lot of talk about injustice, and there's a lot of insistence on injustice, and so if you want to make a world that's unjust, you want to achieve justice, what do you do about it? You get very clear instructions on what you should do and what you may not do.

There is the *halal* and the *haram*. If you want to be a good person, and I think most human beings want to be good people, you get this manual of "this is what is forbidden," and I want to give you just a list of what's forbidden. It's forbidden for men and women to mix because it's sinful. Therefore, for instance, all recreational activities that we in the West take for granted are forbidden. Going to the cinema, going out to dance, going to cafes and restaurants, going to a soccer match together or any other kind of sports engagement where men and women would mix. All of this is portrayed as extremely sensual.

And because you do not want to sin, you may not, you know, waste time – your time, instead of worshipping God and singing his praises, you're now wasting, you're using that time to commit a sin. And then they go on and on about the mixing of the genders, the mixing of the sexes. When something like Paris happened, the November 13 attacks in Paris and the places that they attacked, those are really consistent with what is drummed into the ears of a lot of Muslims who may not act on it but we're told it's sinful.

What's *halal*? What's allowed for you to do? You get a list of things that you may engage in. And then there's a gray area. And there are libraries full of jurisprudence on discussions about that gray area. So in the 21st century, talking about this – you would say this is just neurosis taken to an extreme. But the tragedy is we can't really laugh about it because it is now being taught to young people who – the age at which this is being taught is getting younger and younger, and the more and more people for whom it is not only appealing, but have digested and are taking it and spreading it among their peers is much larger.

So the appeal is it's familiar, it is your religion, it is – and it's exciting, it's empowering, it's thrilling. If you're a young man and you live here or you live in Europe and, you know, you have to get a job and you have to, you know, commute to work five days a week and you're told in terms of it's a material world, you're working to have a home and car and wife and children, and you ask yourself, "Is that it?" Whereas look at what the Islamic State is doing? They are offering you everything all at once.

KRISTOL: I suppose the jihad aspect of Islam – I was thinking, as you spoke, there are very orthodox Jews for whom there's quite a lot of separation of the sexes and, of course, a huge amount of time studying and studying obscure Jewish jurisprudential works and – but on the whole, they are exceptions. These people become somewhat just withdrawn from the world and inwardly focused on their communities, and the same is true of some Christian sects and denominations.

I think what makes Islam a little different – and there are parts of Islam that have that character, too, I think – but I guess this sort of jihad side of Islam seems to give those who then, who get pulled in the direction, the potential of fulfilling their religion fuses, their duties, as they see them. Not just by studying 12 hours a day, which is sort of the more –

HIRSI ALI: The more harmless. So researchers, the work of researchers, they don't call it radical Islam or they try not to call it radical Islam, they try to call it Salafi and Salafism.

And they have these distinctions between the quietist Salafis who would behave like the Jewish group you describe, spend most of their hours worshipping, basically, and don't harm other people. So there are the quietists, and there's a second subset of people in this jargon called the political activists Salafis – they do actually try to take steps to take over the state, but in a nonviolent way. And then the jihadist.

The trouble I think, what makes Islam probably different from the other religions is politics and religion have never been separated. So, if you're a Salafi, and you're a quietist Salafi, it doesn't mean that you are apolitical. You see? I personally prefer the terms Medina, Mecca, and reformers. But let's just adopt the terms and terminology.

KRISTOL: Explain your terms.

HIRSI ALI: In *Heretic*, I try to distinguish between Muslims who I think are peaceful and apolitical and are really not in the least a threat to anyone. And, in fact, in many ways, they become the victims of Islamic extremism. And when I reflect on how they worship and what parts of their religion they make salient for themselves, it is the period of Muhammad in Mecca when he was basically engaged only in teaching and he had a spiritual message, and then they try to ignore everything else that happened later in Medina. But when he goes to Medina, 10 years after the founding of Islam, he becomes a militiaman. He becomes a legislator; he's a warrior. And his message is all – is really what we would now call totalitarian.

And Muslims who like that part of Islam and who want to go back to that period – the ones that my fellow researchers call Salafis, or they've settled for the term Salafis – I would rather called them Medina Muslims because what the Medina Muslims, whether they were nonviolent or violent, whether they were active or apathetic, what they aspire to is, you know, divine law. Society governed by Allah.

And according to Sharia law, the Koran is basically the constitution. So an entity like the Muslim Brotherhood, I would put that under the label Medina Muslims. I know that recently they've become gradualist, and they've decided to participate through the political system. But the violent jihadists are also Medina Muslims, so is the Islamic State – their endgame is the same, the objective is the same. They disagree on the means to get to that objective.

So again that is what makes Islam different from other religions, and I think, in other religions, believers have accepted. And there's always a fringe, of course. But they've largely accepted not only the

separation of religion from politics, from – also, the order of nation-states that we have, the world order that was established under US leaderships since 1945. Muslim extremists reject that world order.

It's not only about trying to prevent the next terrorist attack here locally. Islamic extremists, or the Medina Muslims, have a very local and very regional and global agenda. And these agendas are sometimes linked, and sometimes these groups are operating separately and are sometimes even enemies of one another. For instance, the government of Saudi Arabia, the biggest sponsor of Islamic extremism, is opposed to the Islamic State. There are these internal contradictions, but the message itself, the core message, is the same, and I think the only thing, the only way out of this crisis – civilizational crisis that Islam is undergoing is to reform the religion.

KRISTOL: Another way people put it is, Judaism is also a religion of law – Islam probably got that from Judaism probably – quite total law – but Judaism is not, on the whole. I mean, individual Jews can be aggressive, and Israel can take territory from a neighborhood state, if you want to accuse it of that, but there's no mandate or command to convert other people, and in fact, the expectation in the Hebrew Bible is that Jews will always be one people among many.

So there's not that kind of imperialism, you might say – Christianity is universal so it has a kind of, you might say, imperial mission, but it's mostly, and not always, in history, otherworldly so it's supposed – and Islam has combined, in a certain way, the two in a way that gives it the most potential. Of course, that's why it was unbelievably successful in the first few centuries. I mean, no religion has ever done what Islam did, really conquered huge amounts from nowhere.

HIRSI ALI: Come from nowhere and conquer all these empires and establish an empire and was an empire only until, you know, less than 200 years ago.

With Christianity, I think – I think Christianity has also gone through a period. The Reformation. Its violent past. If you talk about Christianity in Europe, it's very different from Christianity in the US. And no one is denying that there are religious texts and other religions – there are violent elements, but what makes 21st-century Islam unique and different from other religions is the separation from politics and religion hasn't occurred, and violence – and the idea of violence, in other words, the idea of jihad – it hasn't been put to rest. And that has to happen. The – what Medina Muslims, what they do is they advertise and they instruct their children and they indoctrinate young people with an idea that makes life after death – sorry, yes, life after death more attractive.

And so they turn Islam into a cult of death. Even if, and even when, they are not violent. So if you keep teaching your children there's no need for recreation here, there's no need to have pleasure here, just spend as many hours as possible trying to get as many points as you can to be rewarded when you die after the day of judgment, you inadvertently create a cult of death.

Medina Muslims have also cultivated – and it's a very basic concept within Islam – it's called commanding right and forbidding wrong, and maybe you could call that jihad-lite. But one of the reasons, why again – if we look at the San Bernardino case and the cases in Paris, you know, all of these jihadist, terrorist attacks, that are unfolding that we are seeing, there is this long process – how come we haven't seen it? How come we can't stop it?

Well, if your friend and your neighbor and your loved one is commanding right and forbidding wrong, why would you report them to the police? You are the one who is, you know, everybody believes in this whole thing in being rewarded and punished for what you do and fail to do and life after death. So if you also care about your life after death, and you yourself are not violent, but turning your brother in or turning someone who is actually doing something about that into the authorities is going to compromise your place in Heaven. It gets very, very complex.

KRISTOL: I want to ask you about Europe, about America, but one more psychological question. I think for Americans, understanding that a woman that grew up in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia and lived in that world, the way in which you could be radicalized, let's just call it that, one can understand that.

It's more mystifying when you have, then, her husband in this case who grew up in America, I think he was born in America, and here he is in the same – going to a public high school, if I'm not mistaken, I don't think he went to a segregated Islamic school, he works for the state government or a county government, I guess. That is, I think more mystifying in a way to people that, you know, this – America always seems to Americans such a powerful, cultural thing – how could someone so thoroughly reject it?

HIRSI ALI: I think it shouldn't be mystifying because the infrastructure of indoctrination that I described in Nairobi is also here. There are Islamic centers here, mosques, manifesto publishing houses, and a million organizations all pushing an Islamist agenda. That's all here in America. I think in a way the fact that we are mystified speaks maybe a little bit to our arrogance. The fact that we think that people come from somewhere else and all of these wonderful things will just rub off on them.

It was really painful to watch the shock of the colleagues of this guy, Syed Farook – they threw him a baby shower, they interacted with him on a daily basis. The neighbor who said, "I knew there was something that wasn't right, but I couldn't allow myself to think that because I'm not bigoted." To think that you spot something and, you know, that your gut feeling, if that were a white man, let's say he was a white supremacist, and she saw these boxes coming, she definitely would have called the FBI.

In many ways, I think we are not mystified because we can't know what's going on. I think we are mystified because we don't want to know. We've been conditioned to think that if we hold people of color and other religions and the religions of the people of color to the same standards that we hold ourselves that we're bigoted.

KRISTOL: I also think, as you say, we're arrogant and optimistic in the sense that we assume people came from so many different places and cultures to the United States, and so many different backgrounds within the United States, and they mostly – of course, there were individual instances and bumps in the road – but people have all become a melting pot, as we say.

It's striking how, I guess that's a question – what you're saying is there would there be more a melting pot if there weren't these institutions dragging people back?

HIRSI ALI: Dragging back? I think these institutions are taking advantage of the fact that there is this relativism and cultural relativism and the idea of multiculturalism and that there is this political correctness. I don't think the Islamist agents want – that they've imposed political correctness on us. What they have found is relativist, politically correct society, that is, an open society and a free society.

They have taken advantage, they're exploiting these advantages, but they have made us do it. It is, I think, our responsibility to undo that, yeah. And it's becoming very difficult. I am now, you know, seeing the same conversations here in the US that I was used to in Europe where there is this notion of multiculturalism and all groups are the same and all cultures are the same and all religions are equal, and in a way, you are punished by the mainstream if you challenge that, if you say, "But cultures are not equal." It's now become the liberal blasphemy to say cultures are not equal and religions are not equal and that it's dangerous actually to think this because then you become complacent and you forget that, you know, liberalism is a relatively new idea, and liberal societies are relatively new.

And the open society has enemies. And we will forever have enemies because there are people who just hate civilization. And that's not because they are Muslim or they are not Muslim, it has nothing to do with that. The totalitarian challenge of the day is Islamic totalitarianism but, and I hope we defeat that, but once we defeat that there are going to be some other totalitarians. The open society is going to be challenged, and the only way to maintain it and to preserve it is by having a polity that is educated and

that doesn't entertain these nonsensical ideas, nonsensical and dangerous, such as multiculturalism and all cultures and religions are equal.

II: How We Can Fight Back (40:14 – 1:06:38)

KRISTOL: What can we do given where we are now? What American policies are sensible? What are foolish? What attitudes need to be changed? If the President called you up – maybe the next President will call you up and ask?

HIRSI ALI: I think we should, you know, again, we're an open liberal society so we should call a spade a spade, if we don't diagnose problems properly, then we won't be able to develop policies that address them effectively.

We're talking about Islam here, we're talking about religion in a civilization with followers. There's, one in every five people is a Muslim on the planet. It has a religious dimension, and it has a political dimension, and it also has other dimensions. We have problems with the political dimension of Islam. The mixing of politics and religion. And even when you accept that and you can speak openly about it we understand, you know, that the development of this political Islam into an ideology, and there are the agents who organize themselves to push that agenda.

There are resources, and we know that these resources come from private persons, but they also come from nation-states like Saudi Arabia explicitly, Kuwait, Qatar. On a foreign policy level, again, don't just focus on violent extremism because that's when things get out of hand. But if you take this whole process where you say, "Let's start with the nonviolent ideas and who's pushing that idea and those resources," you are going to have all of the elements in your foreign and domestic policy. That way you don't only rely on surveillance and military means.

We as a country can choose who we let into the United States, and who we don't. I think we would have to make conditional for people that we allow in that they explicitly reject that political dimension of Islam. We have to spell out what it is that they reject and what they need to accept.

And in order to do that – and I don't know if that is something that a politician can do, because we are in, you know, this idea of relativism and political correctness, that is something that – it is everywhere. It's on campuses. It is in the media, in the mainstream media. And, of course, it is in politics. So that is the self-censorship that we've imposed on ourselves. That is something that we have to address to deal with.

I believe that America is exceptional, that America should lead the world, and if we don't have American leadership, the world is going to become an ever more dangerous place. We should be proud of articulating exactly what it is that makes the idea of America so exceptional and superior to the idea of political Islam and other bad ideas in history. Again, to do that we have to shed this political correctness that we have, you know. And also not have these conversations about if you start talking seriously about some of the threats we face, you're called "extreme rightwing." We just engage in this name-calling, and it's a form of intellectual poverty. Again, self-imposed.

KRISTOL: It sounds as if the multiculturalism you think is really – this is "Who are we to say what kind of Islam people should have, or who are we to discriminate among the people we admit from different countries," I suppose. I guess, we do discriminate against people with criminal records, but that's about all.

HIRSI ALI: We discriminate all the time, we profile all the time. How can we tell someone why do have all these airports and airline conditions? We do take a lot of steps, and we've been safe, largely, since 9/11 because we do take these steps. My problem with, say, our government is because we refuse to call the problem by it's name, we tie our hands, and we limit ourselves to the most drastic of policies, which is

exclusively military and exclusively surveillance, so you know – and I hope you agree with me, if you believe that ideas shape minds.

We're not fighting on the battlefield of ideas when, in fact, we have a superior idea. The idea of America and the content of the Constitution of America is so much more superior to everything in the Koran. We should be able to say this explicitly. If there is somebody here in our mosques and Muslim centers taking our Americans Muslim audiences and trying to indoctrinate them that Sharia law is superior to the idea of America, we should be able to have a rebuttal ready.

KRISTOL: Doesn't have to be government, I suppose, but no one wants to be impolite so people don't say what you've just said and they don't make the case for liberal democracy in a sense and then allow illiberal organizations to flourish in the middle of the liberal democracy.

HIRSI ALI: When we do that, then we end up leaving that extremely important space, the arena of ideas, we leave it to the extremists – on the one hand, Islamic extremists; on the other hand, those that respond to that. Again, in the context of Europe, I'm sure you've been following the rise of radical rightwing parties, political parties.

And the segments of the European population with substantial Muslims living among them were alarmed by Islam. They have only one place to go now, and it's these extreme rightwing parties because the established parties, because of this political correctness, they simply refuse to address it. And we are seeing things like that develop here in the United States where Americans who are alarmed by Islamic extremists are now ready to give their vote to anti-establishment figures who at least say what they think.

We're being punished for that political correctness, and it's coming from the population, and I think it's very, very dangerous to let this go out of hand.

KRISTOL: Both, in the backlash, can get out of hand. I feel bad for the young Muslim Americans growing up in, let's say, fairly pro-American kind of families with the peaceful worship of Koran, or they don't worship – how much they pray, that's their own decision. But it seems to me the refusal to draw lines leaves them much more susceptible to being recruited by the more activist –

HIRSI ALI: So there is some good news. I know we are taping it today – I don't know when you're going to air it but – today, I don't know what the date is, but early December, we have a group of American Muslims, and some of them are European, they launched Muslim Reform. They're saying, "We are Muslims for reform." They are not denying that there is a problem within Islam. And I think they are the people that our President should be talking to.

Some of these names are prominent names like Zuhdi Jasser – these are individuals who grew up in America and are Americanized in every way possible and yet identify themselves as Muslim because they adhere to the faith dimension of Islam and not the political dimension. And they should be the people that we should not only be talking to, but we should also be, in many ways, giving them the resources to reach out and to compete with the infrastructure of Islamist indoctrination that is always well-established in the hearts and minds of Muslims who already live here, whether they are citizens or, you know, residents or whatever. Or asylum-seekers, or you name it.

It's just a way of reaching these people and telling them, "Listen, the guy that just told you that Sharia law is better than American law, you need to ask him why everywhere where Sharia law is established why human rights are violated. And why rights of women are robbed and why are there beheadings and amputations? And why this violence?" That is Sharia law, and this is America, you came to America in search of a better life, and life here on earth is much better than life after death, which none of us really come back as witnesses to report from what happens afterwards.

It is, and I think this sounds very simplistic but it's conversations like this that you have in the classroom, that you have in the neighborhood, that you have in the places on the internet where young Muslim people frequent. That is where you can generate these question marks like the ones that popped up in my head. I know those question marks are there. And I think what we need to do is exploit that dissonance between "I want to ask this question. Why should I only obey?" and you know, the merits of the Prophet Mohammed, is it really good to follow his example all the time?

These are the questions that the reformers are asking already. And any young Muslim that allows himself, or allows herself to think about these things always gets these questions. All we need to do is just give them a helping hand.

KRISTOL: So in that respect the multiculturalism, the political correctness, the difference to the way to the established organizations, the Islamist organizations, is not just neutral, but it actually make things worse in a way, right? It legitimates. It's those organizations that speak for Islam.

HIRSI ALI: I have a piece of paper here that I think you should take with you because I asked my researcher – because it's public knowledge – can you please find out who our President talks to when he says he's reaching out to Muslims? This is an organized Islamist's lobby, and they have an Islamist's agenda in the long term. They say this, and this is not a secret, they say this quite often in their own letters, they would like to Islamize America.

So why is our President talking to this group and not talking to the groups who are very serious about and really sincere about finding a true balance between being an American and a Muslim?

KRISTOL: I don't know. What is the answer?

HIRSI ALI: That means, maybe the next President – I think because these groups are organized and well-founded and articulate. They have media arms, and they have completely studied how things work in America, and they are applying that, and I think that our President was a very busy man and doesn't, you know, "What am I supposed to say them?" I think he is well-meaning, like my fellow Europeans were all very well-meaning, but there is a laziness, I have to say, about not wanting – okay, "They are organized, they say they speak for Islam, I will take –"

KRISTOL: If they feel they're being included, they'll moderate, maybe or there won't be as much violence?

HIRSI ALI: To say they will be able to mobilize people who will vote. They're all kinds of reasons why politicians – sometimes, I think, sometimes it's just a blind spot. But sometimes there are reasons why people don't want to see what is in front of them.

KRISTOL: How about the fact, Bin Laden made famous, he said that in the Middle East at least people follow the strong horse, not the weak horse?

I do think when Europe lets you be driven out of Europe, and when we allow ourselves as a country – this is very different, but we've see it before – threats in the Middle East and elsewhere, and ISIS looks like it's winning. That must have an effect at home, I should think. I think the whole thing does reinforce that this is the way of the future, that the West is weak and so forth.

HIRSI ALI: The Islamist agenda, the books and pamphlets and manifestos and websites that I have read in the United States constantly call the United States in terms of its spirituality a void, decadent and corrupt.

The answer is – and why have they become like this? Because they have rejected to heed the oneness of Allah, they are not submitted to the one God who gives us strength. And then you have groups like ISIS emerging and young people think, Well, that's it. Islam is stronger, and it is going to rule the world.”

Again, we are in an open society so we obviously have discussions, and we are critical of our government, and we are critical of one another, and Islamists use that to say, they're saying to themselves, “Look at that. Americans are saying we are racists; they must be racists if they are saying it themselves.” And I don't think we can stop that and we shouldn't stop that, we should have the free flow of ideas, they shouldn't determine how we speak to one another, but we should also try and learn as much as we can about them as they have learned about us. What are they saying about us? What are they saying about Americans? Why is that resonating, and what can we do to target the same audiences and tell them the truth about ourselves?

KRISTOL: You've lived in Europe and have both the wonderful experience there and then an awful experience and now in America for a little over a decade, I suppose. Just curious what your thoughts are about Europe and America – similar and contrast?

HIRSI ALI: If we stay with this topic, the most striking difference is in Europe you have political parties, but if you want to achieve something you establish a political party, and here you have candidates. Individual candidates. So the system is different. I think in the United States, we don't have only one, you know, one mainstream media, we do the mainstream media, but there is push back from *The Wall Street Journal*, what you guys do, Fox.

It's not a deadening political correctness and that whole multiculturalism thing, and I call it the social-democratic burden, that is not here. It might – I know that a lot of people, a lot of liberals here are very attracted to that and find European systems and European political correctness attractive, but it hasn't engulfed the whole nation. It hasn't brought us to the same paralysis, I think.

Americans are also more optimistic. Americans are having kids, and a lot of Europeans have decided to just let that go. We have a very robust debate here about asylum-seekers and refugees and Islam that the Europeans have been struggling to have for a long time and sometimes there are these odd bursts and they do have them, but it's not really followed with policy. And I think the most, probably the most important thing is Americans govern themselves, whereas a lot of Europeans have conceded control to Brussels.

KRISTOL: The self-government side of it is very important, but it's one reason I think to fight back against attempts to turn America into a European-style, centralized – And the universities, you've dealt with them a lot in different ways. Do you worry that the universities are educating a younger generation of Americans to be more like the Europeans like you described? Is it working or not working?

HIRSI ALI: So when I'm on campuses I'm surrounded by very young, very serious, brilliant students. Hardworking and not at all riotous. Sometimes you read about these students who are in constant riot mode, and you think when do they study? It's only three years before you get your bachelor's, or three years, and you know that the four years fly by.

But this whole thing about trigger warnings, and by the way, singling out minorities for what, in my view, is itself racist and sexist and exclusivist. Why as a black woman, as a black student, would it hurt me to read Mark Twain? Why do I need a trigger for that? It's this sort of nonsense. I don't know if it's a fad and will pass, but it is definitely worrisome.

One difference between Europe and the US, US Ivy League colleges are extremely expensive, and it's the parents that pay for that. And if you're paying 50, 60 thousand dollars a year for kids to be protected from ideas and from discussing ideas, I think that's a tragedy. I think it's a tragedy that all these presidents and faculty members are resigning instead of – if I were a president of any of these

universities and they were out there protesting, I would say, “I’ll give you a suspension warning and then you will be expelled. This is place you come to study, learn, and discuss, and not riot.”

I saw the images in Dartmouth in the library. Those were really disturbing. Where students walked through a library shouting obscenities and putting their middle finger in front of the faces of students. That is worrisome, that is not freedom of expression, because a university is an institution of learning, and bursting into library behaving that way, those students should have been expelled.

KRISTOL: What’s been happening with the last few months and year or so with the universities, it’s beyond political correctness now, it really is a dislike of freedom of speech and freedom of thought, don’t you think?

HIRSI ALI: Am I becoming too American that I’m optimistic enough to say the fact that all of that is now in the open might lead to change or should I be more worried or more pessimistic?

KRISTOL: I’m not sure. The universities are harder to change. I think in America one reason it pays to be optimistic is there are huge incentives and rewards for people to improve and get things right. So businesses are always self-correcting, creative destruction. And I guess that’s even true in policy. Politicians have to win elections; if things are going badly, in a way, the system has a certain impetus to self-correction built in. If it’s a fluid enough system that protestors will come and win elections. Universities seem particularly –

HIRSI ALI: Resistant to change.

KRISTOL: Tenure and the way they are set up, and no one challenges them, and everyone is intimidated by them. I’d say I was struck myself when I worked in education, at the Education Department will Bill Bennett that K through 12 education, you could challenge. There were big problems there for elementary and secondary education, but parents thought they had a right to say, “I don’t like that, my kid shouldn’t be learning that,” or “Why isn’t my daughter learning math better, and if she isn’t, I want to have the right to take her to a different school,” or “I’d like to go online and use online education.” Higher education, people are so intimidated by the degrees and who am I to question Harvard or Brandeis or whatever? I think it’s much harder to get the normal self-corrective markets to work.

HIRSI ALI: That is very sad then because it is the universities where ultimately we educate our leaders. This is to protect them from ideas and from debates and from discussion or from critical thinking – I don’t think that’s an education.

KRISTOL: Last thing I want to ask about, foreign policy. I do think of, we’re talking about Americans being mystified earlier how someone who was born here and grew up here could be a jihadist killer – but I also think the rise of ISIS and just the fact of it is so mind-boggling to Americans. And they don’t, and it’s sort of bewildering, a little paralyzing almost. What do we do? We can’t just bomb them forever? Is this the wave of the future? No one thought 25 years ago that, you know, that the 21st century would be a jihadist century.

Seems crazy – this is modernity, enlightenment, prosperity. How strong – I guess, I would say this – how optimistic should we be that if we have strength from America and other countries a lot of this could go away pretty quickly? How much of this is a generational struggle, and how deeply embedded is it in the world of Islam?

HIRSI ALI: I say, you know, we cannot really win the war on Islamic terrorism if we don’t understand Islamic totalitarianism. Remember, we’ve been confronted with totalitarianism previously, Communism and before that National Socialism. Both ideologies claimed millions and millions and millions of lives. And we saw a great deal of war and destruction before they were defeated.

And what for me is frustrating, especially if I look back on the last 14 years since 9/11, is having had that past and knowing a totalitarian ideology when we see it and how it manifest itself, why are we in such denial about it? Because it is all about the sooner we recognize it, the sooner we can really deal with it. We cannot defeat Islamic terrorism until we address Islamic totalitarianism. That's the difficult part. And I hope, I really hope that we can find national unity on trying to understand that first component before we start throwing bombs and before we start slapping policies and money on, you know, different aspects of the problem.

We do have things going now. We have all kinds of policies, but they are incoherent. We refused to call this by its name because we don't want to declare war on Islam, understandably. We don't want to declare war on 1.5 billion people, and we are not. But here is this totalitarian idea that doesn't have and doesn't make the same considerations. And it's preying, first and foremost, on Muslims.

You know, we can't go back to and de-globalize the world. We are linked in many, many ways. I think ultimately the next leader – I really do not expect that President Obama is going to deal with Islamic totalitarianism. He's not going to call it by its name; even if he did, he doesn't have the time to change policies as radically as policies need to be changed now, but the next president and Congress and the American people should educate themselves on Islamic totalitarianism.

What is the concept of the caliphate? What is Sharia law? What is jihad? How does it all come together? What is the political project? Who are the agents involved in this? These are questions you have to answer first before you can develop a coherent policy.

KRISTOL: Reading your books would be a great start for the next president, and we should make sure he or she does that before he or she takes office. Anyway, thank you so much, Ayaan, for joining me today. And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]